

Exodus 4:18-7:7

Study Outline

Launching question

John is fed up with his job, family, marriage, etc. He can't understand why God doesn't make things improve. If anything, the more he prays, the worse he feels. What would you say to him about God's apparent inactivity? Our passage today will show what God speaks into this kind of scenario.

Read 4:18-23

Who is the battle between? Over whom is the battle fought?
What is the reaction of Jethro (18), Aaron 27-29) and the people (30-31) to the news of God's plan to rescue Israel from Egypt?

Chapter 5 is a dark chapter.

Read 5:1-9

Describe the Pharaoh of these verses.
What makes his question in 5:2 significant? *more than one answer*
Look back to 3:18-19. What more does that tell us about Pharaoh?

What has God done so far about all that he's promised to do?
What effect does Pharaoh's reaction have on the Israelites?

- *compare 5:1 and 5:10* whose words will Israel listen to?
- *compare 2:23 and 5:15* who will Israel cry out to?

What effect does Pharaoh's reaction have on Moses? (cf 5:22-23)

Have you ever felt similar things about God? Why? How did you react?
How can we be sure that God has our best interests at heart?
What did Israel have to go on, at this point in the story?

Read 6:1-10 and 7:1-5

Moses used lots of 'you' language in 5:22-23. How does God respond?
God is reaffirming his intentions: what will this mean for Israel (6:6-8)?
And what will this mean for Pharaoh (7:2-5)?
What is God doing? is God keeping his promise of 4:21?

We're told about Moses great age (in 7:7): what does this add to this picture of these verses? Does this make things look better or worse?

Thinking it through

These chapters put a mighty Pharaoh alongside an unimpressive-looking opposition (unhappy people, weak leaders, etc):
what is God's answer to such an unlikely situation?

Return to the opening scenario: use verses from here to work out what you might now say to John.
Why do the words/promises of God seem to us to be nothing special?

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Study 3

THE GOD WHO IS DETERMINED

Summary

Exodus is the story of God showing us what he is like: he is the God who rescues his people. He does this in faithfulness to his promises, for his own glory, and out of sheer mercy and kindness to those he has chosen. We should expect to know our God better through reading this book.

The story so far

The emphasis is very firmly on God's covenant. He has bound himself to act on behalf of his people by making promises to them (cf Genesis 12:1-3). In particular, the promise of **descendants** is patently being fulfilled (cf 12:27), and is the very reason why Pharaoh is oppressing Israel. There has also been evidence of God's **blessing** on them (1:19, 20b) and on those who bless them (1:20a, 21). But the third element of the promise of Gen 12:1-3, 7, the **land**, remains unfulfilled, and is what God now resolves (cf 3:8).

He has appointed Moses, despite his many excuses, to be the one to rescue Israel out of Egypt and lead them back to the promised land of Canaan. But the true 'hero' continues to be the covenant God: he will actually be their redeemer. God has further clarified who their covenant God really is: he has revealed his name to them (as 'Yhwh' = the LORD), and this act of rescue as the way he is to be forever remembered.

In this passage, the storyline doesn't really advance, except (if anything) the situation deteriorates so that the need for rescue is all the more urgent. Into such a situation, God reiterates his promise. The question is: will Israel continue to trust him (cf 4:31)?

Theme Sentence

Although it seems even less likely, God will rescue Israel from Egypt.

Ideas for application

- we know who God is through what he has done, and in particular that he is the rescuing God through this story of the Exodus. For all eternity, we'll be praising him for this, so we might as well get used to appreciating his rescue of us from our sin: this is who our God is!
- in difficult situations, like the Israelites (in Exod 5), we have the sure promise of God to cling to; it may often be hard to continue to trust him to deliver on what he has promised, but his promise is certain.
- nothing is too hard for the Lord, and even the most challenging situation is no threat to him and his plans (cf 'all things' in Eph 1:11).

Commentary

4:18-21 Moses returns to Egypt (20), sure of his message and the response he can expect: Pharaoh will refuse to listen (21). As God had foreseen, there could not be rescue without judgement (cf Gen 15:14; Ex 7:4). The Israelites too will respond just as God said: they will (and do) worship the God who remembers his covenant and acts to save his people (31).

4:21-23 God makes it 'more difficult' for himself by hardening Pharaoh's heart (cf [Study 4](#)).

4:24-26 These verses are tricky: God is angry with Moses because his son is not circumcised. The problem is probably Moses' failure to identify his family fully with the covenant people, and so with God's promises to Abraham (Gen 15-17). In the context of 4:23 (cf 13:14-16), a further point is that Moses' son prefigures all who escape God's wrath by the shedding of blood.

5:1-3 This passage is often used to teach about Christian leadership: Moses is humbled (2:11-15), called (3:1-10), enabled (3:10-4:12), etc. But rather, he's establishing a pattern for the role of the prophet. God was to speak to him 'face to face, clearly and not in riddles' (Num 12:8), so that he, in turn, was to bring God's word to the people. And in this way, 'a prophet like Moses' (Deut 18:18) is exactly what Jesus fulfilled (Acts 3:22). He was a messenger of the universal King to all who disputed his rule. He would be their ruler and judge to lead them through the wilderness, intercede when they sinned and instruct them in the way. And to rebel against him is to reject the Lord he serves. (And in those last three sentences, 'he' could refer equally to Moses or to Jesus.)

And so Moses comes into the presence of Pharaoh and speaks out: 'Thus says the Lord'. Like many a later OT prophet, Moses decries the anti-God powers of his day who are set on the most disastrous collision course.

5:2 Pharaoh asks the question Moses had predicted (cf 3:13): who is the LORD? This question of identity is the crucial issue of the whole story (cf 6:3): it's all about God revealing who he is. Soon not only Pharaoh but all Egypt (7:5), all Israel (6:6-7), and indeed all the world (9:16) for all generations (3:15) will know him. The LORD will make himself known through redeeming his people.

Here, of course, the real issue is an unwillingness to obey the LORD (2). Until now, Pharaoh's suppression of Israel had been an unconscious opposition to God: that is no longer the case. His dismissal of God's word to him as 'lying words' (9) makes the point: he has no respect whatsoever for this LORD or what he says.

5:4-23 Despite God's promise, it looks as though the fruit of Moses' message is going to be increased slavery rather than freedom. Delay leads to doubt. The anger that comes from the Israelites (21) reveals the superficiality of their earlier faith (4:31). And Moses shares the people's concerns (22-23). Where is the promised rescue?

This is a dark chapter which describes a battle for the hearts and minds of God's people. Two examples of the rivalry are ...

- compare 5:1 and 5:10 whose words will Israel listen to?
- compare 2:23 and 5:15 who will Israel cry out to?

In ch 5, Moses and Aaron are brought low and Pharaoh is exalted: he is confident, overwhelming in power and his place in the world. But this is all so that the God in ch 6 might better be made known.

5:22-23 is very like the blaming of Gen 3:12-13. Notice how Moses uses 'you' and 'your' language.

6:1f After the silence and tension of ch 5, God himself speaks. God's response to their doubt is simply to repeat the same promise. He reveals himself as 'the LORD', the redeemer, who 'brought you out'.

For Israel, this is going to mean knowing him as their own God and Saviour (6:7), the one who will keep his covenant word to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (3-4), and who is not oblivious to his people's suffering (5): he will act (6). He will bring them out and free them (6), and take them as his own people (7).

For the Egyptians, this will mean that they too know him to be the LORD (7:5), but that he will not be their God. We've wondered when God would fulfil his promise to curse those who dishonour Abraham's family (Gen 12:3), and 7:4-5 makes it clear that the rescue of Israel from Egypt will involve 'great acts of judgement' against Egypt, and God's hand 'stretched out against' her. Because of Pharaoh's hardness of heart, judgement will fall on Egypt. He may not know the Lord yet (5:2), but he soon will!

6:14-26 make two points. First, Moses and Aaron are descended from Jacob and Levi: they are men of great pedigree. But although that is true, secondly, they are men of considerable age, and Moses has 'uncircumcised lips' (6:12, 30). Ageing leaders, an inarticulate prophet ... the scene is set for God to do things his way: when evil is at its greatest, when his people are at their lowest, when his spokesmen are at their weakest, God will be God. This is just what the NT speaks of when it talks of 'the weakness of God as stronger than man's strength' (1 Cor 1:18-25).

That is why these verses (6:1-11; 7:1-5) are so full of 'I'. We should be in no doubt after these verses who is the hero of the book of Exodus! There are many NT parallels to this determined God (cf 'all things' in Roms 8:28; Eph 1:11, etc).